

Queen's Man

By Richard Paul

The Queen gave command to all her soldiers
Who were ever taught to read or to write
To find a moment to compose a letter
In this, the final and surely sleepless night;
To set down our account of this matter
And afterwards to hide our words out of sight,
To be found again in days grown better.

Need I tell the tale? I suppose so.
You stand in the city of Ultramir
And have found the epitaph of Encardo;
As I write this, an army marches here
To murder our Queen and lay the city low.
I'm told two hundred-thousand men draw near,
We have less than half that, maybe? I don't know.

The invaders, come from over the sea,
Make plain their cause, they won't abide a Queen;
This nonsense they cry through out land constantly,
That a woman should rule they declare obscene,
Yet this is nothing but a flimsy screen
To conceal their rulers' wretched greed,
For Ultramir is a realm hugely wealthy.

The opulence of our land was hard-earned,
Brought forth by our Queen and before her, her father
And his father before him in his turn
And before him, his mother and grandmother,
But tell that to the traitors who have spurned
Their home and own and joined the invaders,
To march in their ranks, depravity to learn.

Any worthless wretch with a nagging wife
Or an overbearing mother rejoiced
At the invaders' promise of a new life
Where womenfolk are denied any voice.
They envision futures where their pride is rife,
Where days unfurl according to *their* choice,
Instead these fools have been sent into strife.

The foe will make a vanguard of these traitors
And tire our arms on their foolish skins.
When they are spent, up come the true soldiers
To break the gate and cause havoc within.
No friends to decent men are these monsters,
Setting division twixt neighbours and kin.
They would grow fat as we harm each other.

I fain would end my tale-telling now
And spend the final hours of this night
With my wife, that what comfort may be found
We might share before the dawn's woeful light.
Either of us may easily be cut down,
Hasty indeed was our training to fight
And we seem to no cheerful future bound.

But... no, one last thing, pray heed this, my friend,
Do not take me for the doom-prophet I seem.
I will give my all, Ulthramir must not end!
Brutes and swine shall not destroy our beloved Queen
Whilst me and those like me have strength to fend
Off the barbarians and turn the green
Of the jade trading road red as we rend.

But if we've failed, I urge you to see
In the wide world around you all the woe,
All the depredations of tyranny,
The famine and bitterness so long unknown,
And wonder just what evil could the Queen,
By a brutal war and horrid sack dethroned,
Do more than that which the aftermath has seen?

And if your conclusions are like to mine,
Please, take counsel from your conscience, and your spine.

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